REPORT ON FOLLOW-UP SURVEY: NACBS SPEAKERS' PROGRAM

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1. Preface

At the 2001 Council meeting, I was delegated to follow up on one of the items that emerged from the survey results that I presented to the Council at that meeting. I did two things in order to fulfill my task. First, I contacted Phi Beta Kappa (PBK) and the Organization of American Historians (OAH), which have long-standing programs that might serve as a model. Second, I sent a follow-up survey by e-mail to 61 members—essentially those who had responded to the 2001 survey.

2. PBK and OAH as models

When I contacted PBK and OAH, my interest was in how their rosters of speakers were chosen, since that was an issue raised at our Council meeting. Annette Windhorn, Marketing Director of the OAH, informed me that originally the speakers were OAH officers who volunteered; now, potential speakers are identified by the current officers and the executive office and the list is formally approved by the president. They make an effort to insure that all major subject areas are represented. The information sheet sent to me by PBK stated that a formal committee of thirteen members nominates prospective visiting scholars (as they are called by PBK) and puts together a roster of twelve or thirteen each year. Each of the selected scholars visits an average of eight campuses during the year, spending two days at each campus. PBK pays for their travel and a $2000 honorarium; host campuses pay local expenses and a $300 service fee.

3. Survey

I sent the survey by e-mail to 61 people and received 19 responses (31%). Below is a summary of the responses to each of the four questions.

1. **Do you or colleagues in your department currently bring guest speakers on British studies topics to campus? If so, briefly describe the frequency, resources available, etc. If not, why not?**

   Virtually all respondents said that they did not, or had not in several years. There were two primary reasons. The first was a lack of interest and the attendant difficulty of getting a respectable audience. The second, mentioned less often, was lack of funds. Some noted that there were institutional funds—sometimes through a formal program or series—but that they only had access to those every five or six years since they were shared across departments. A few people identified the time and effort involved in bringing a speaker as a reason why they didn't do it more often.

2. **If the NACBS offered a service that sponsored and paid some of the costs of a limited number of campus visits every year by noted scholars, is this something that you would be interested in for your institution?**

   Yes: 17; no: 0; maybe: 2. Many of the "yes" responses were conditional on such things as who the potential speakers were, securing institutional support, and/or the host teaching a course that would connect with the visiting speaker.

3. **If so, what sorts of activities would you expect/want the visitor to offer while on campus (e.g., public lecture, classroom visits, special seminars, informal meetings with faculty and/or students)? Please indicate which activities would be highest priority for speakers visiting your institution.**

   The responses here are somewhat difficult to interpret. About half of the respondents listed more than one activity but did not prioritize. Rather than assuming that the one listed first is more important than the others, I have considered such responses to be indicating that the activities have equally high priority at the respondents' institutions. (If I had assumed that the first item was highest priority, that would have made the preference for public lecture even more pronounced.)

   Highest priority:

public lecture/convocation	16
classroom visits/teach class(es)	11
informal student meetings	7

   Lower priority but still desired/expected:

classroom visits/teach class(es)	4
informal student meetings	3
public lecture	1

   [It should be noted that three people volunteered the suggestion that visiting speakers be shared with other nearby institutions.]

4. **Who would you like to see on a list of NACBS-sponsored speakers? (Please make as many suggestions as you would like, keeping in mind that resources will probably preclude speakers with extremely high fees or who have to be flown from somewhere outside of North America.)**

   In spite of my caution about resources, several of the suggestions made are clearly beyond what we envision being able to afford. However, I have listed <u>all</u> of the suggestions received in the order in which they were received. (I did omit one suggested speaker who is dead.) It is worth noting that <u>no</u> individual was suggested by more than one respondent. Also, a few of the nominators did note that they never heard the person named speak but recommended him/her on the basis of interest in his/her work. About half of the respondents did not give names; many of those gave general recommendations and I have summarized those after the list of names.

Simon Schama, Wm. Roger Louis, David Cannadine, Linda Colley, John Brewer, David Underdown, Helen Vendler, Tim Harris, Richard Price, Annabel Patterson, Lisa Bitel, James S. Donnelly, Kerby Miller, Anna Clark, Deborah Valenze, Kathleen Wilson, Antoinette Burton, Donna Andrew, Alison Games, Anthony Pagden, Nicholas Canny, Jack Greene, David Hancock, David Armitage, John Gillis, Rod Phillips, Jeanne Peterson, Ellen Ross, Peter Stansky, Judith Bennett, Katherine French.

General suggestions of subject areas: British empire/British Atlantic (three); race and/or gender; art history; not Irish; early modern.

There was some disagreement about the sorts of institutions from which the speakers should be chosen. One person preferred speakers from schools with graduate programs because they would be able to talk to undergraduates about the graduate school experience and the application process. On the other hand, three people specifically asked that speakers not be from research institutions. One of these three raised a concern about getting speakers who were more used to teaching undergraduates.

4. Recommendations

First, the survey results raise serious questions for me about whether we ought to proceed with the development of even a limited program. The poor response rate may be some indication of general lack of interest. Many of those who responded, while saying that they would like to bring an NACBS speaker to campus, indicated at the same time that there wasn't much interest on their campuses and that it was hard to build an audience.

If we do want to try this, at least on a limited and experimental basis, I suggest following PBK in setting up a committee independent of the Council that would put together a roster of speakers, which the Executive Committee would endorse (or modify). This committee would be charged with choosing people who represent a range of different fields, and who are known to be good speakers for general (as opposed to specialist) audiences. In addition, they could be asked to select speakers from both graduate and undergraduate institutions.

The number of sponsored visits would, of course, depend on the finances and would be a matter for the Executive Committee. It would, however, have some impact on what we would ask from speakers on the roster and we need to address that. The roster itself, if we strive for some sort of variety of fields, would be much larger than the number of campus visits we could underwrite (even partially). Do we ask speakers for a multi-year commitment, since the odds that they would be pressed into service in one year would be slight? How many campus visits per year or per multi-year term would be asked of any speaker? Also, what limits will be put on what can be asked of them by their hosts?

Finally, if we do proceed, I would recommend that we follow PBK in a couple of their rules for hosting a visiting scholar. Their program is only available to campuses with a PBK chapter, and we should invite only members in good standing to serve as hosts. (Maybe if the program gets some momentum, it may be an inducement to become a member!) Also, when filling requests for visiting scholars PBK gives priority to schools that are not in major urban areas and have limited financial resources for bringing speakers. A similar bias in favor of resource-poor undergraduate colleges might be appropriate for us. Other members should not be excluded, but their requests could be given lower priority.

As one respondent noted, such a program would raise the visibility and enhance the stature of British studies. It would also be good publicity for NACBS. The major question that the survey made clear to me is: Would the return be worth the effort, or are there more effective ways to achieve the same results?

Respectfully submitted,

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